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SUBJECT: LESOTHO: SPEAKER SERIES ON AFRICAN AMERICAN HISTORY

¶1. The week of October 13 through 16, 2009, post organized a four day speaker series with Dr. Lawrence Jackson, Associate Professor of English and African American Studies at Emory University. Dr. Jackson held presentations on the subject of African American History: Politics and the Struggle to Liberation, at various Lesotho high schools and universities.

¶2. The series kicked-off on Tuesday morning with a lively presentation at National University of Lesotho (NUL) International High School and another at Mabathoana High School. Dr. Jackson used sound bites of jazz, soul, blues, swing and hip-hop songs to demonstrate African American music as a device to represent social change and to instantiate racial justice and social-political equality. This music, played during his lecture, revealed changes with time throughout the years of 1930-1999. Dr. Jackson's presentation was well received and left the crowd of over sixty high school students at NUL and over one hundred students at Mabathoana wanting more. The presentation led to question and answer periods on topics such as segregation, crime, drug and alcohol abuse, and current political influences in the U.S. that have impacted Basotho people. This same topic was presented at Lesotho High School on Thursday, to a crowd of over one hundred students who engagingly listened and participated in the presentation. One of the students took part by performing a rap to his peers to show how music has impacted his life.

¶3. On day two, Dr. Jackson presented African American Historic Influences on the Media, to a larger crowd of college students majoring in Mass Media, Communications, Journalism and the Arts at both the Institute of Extra- Mural Studies and Limkokwing University of Creative Technology (LUCT). His description of challenges Black Americans faced in the early 1900's, which led to the stereotyping in roles such as mammies, clowns, and thugs, opened up a lengthy dialogue between the students. One student voiced the difficulties she has experienced as a black woman in Lesotho pursuing a career in media. The presentation at LUCT began with the showing of a documentary on Ralph Ellison, followed by a discussion on the students' perception of Ralph Ellison's involvement in various African American movements in his time. In 2002, Dr. Jackson authored a book on the life of Ralph Ellison and was also featured in a documentary on Ralph Ellison's life. The comments and questions the students directed at Professor Jackson were indicative of the students engagement in the documentary and understanding of the message the professor was delivering to them.

¶4. Overall, the weeklong series had a great impact on Basotho high school and university students. Students were highly motivated, and although many may choose career paths other than music or African history, the talent that exists in the classroom has a far greater understanding of not only the history of African American struggles, but also how popular music has changed over time and is used as a medium for transformation and cultural preservation. Post is eager to continue hosting similar programs to help support the growing interest in the arts in Lesotho.

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